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Amendments to the Claims:

1. (previously presented) A method of inducing hair cell generation or inner-ear-supporting cell growth, regeneration, and/or proliferation, comprising contacting an inner-ear-supporting cell which expresses HER2 and/or HER3 receptors with an effective amount of an isolated ligand which activates HER2 and/or HER3 receptors, said isolated ligand comprising a heregulin polypeptide selected from the group consisting of heregulin- β 2 (SEQ ID NO: 5), heregulin- β 2-like polypeptide (SEQ ID NO: 9), heregulin- β 3 (SEQ ID NO: 7), heregulin γ (SEQ ID NO: 11), heregulin- α (SEQ ID NO: 1) variants, heregulin- β 1 (SEQ ID NO: 3) variants, heregulin- β 2 (SEQ ID NO: 5) variants, heregulin- β 2-like polypeptide (SEQ ID NO: 9) variants, heregulin- β 3 (SEQ ID NO: 7) variants, heregulin γ (SEQ ID NO: 11) variants, heregulin- α (SEQ ID NO: 1) fragments, heregulin- β 1 (SEQ ID NO: 3) fragments, heregulin- β 2 (SEQ ID NO: 5) fragments, heregulin- β 2-like polypeptide (SEQ ID NO: 9) fragments, heregulin- β 3 (SEQ ID NO: 7) fragments, heregulin γ (SEQ ID NO: 11) fragments, heregulin agonist antibody and heregulin agonist antibody fragments.

2. (currently amended) The method of claim 1, wherein the activating ligand isolated ligand which activates HER2 and/or HER3 receptors is a heregulin- α variant, heregulin agonist antibody or fragment thereof capable of binding to the HER2 or HER3 receptor, wherein said heregulin- α variant is selected from the group of heregulin- α variants having an amino acid substitution, deletion or insertion at one or more amino acid residues corresponding to positions 2, 3, 8, 9, 23, 24, 33, 34, 36, 37, 42, 43, 45, 46, 48, 49, 62-67, 86, 87, 110, 111, 123, 124, 134, 135, 142, 143, 151, 152, 164-166, 170-172, 208-218, 226-254, 256-265, 272, 273, 278, 279, 285-309, 437, and 608- 611 in the heregulin- α amino acid sequence of SEQ ID NO: 1.

3. (currently amended) The method of claim 1, wherein the activating ligand isolated ligand which activates HER2 and/or HER3 receptors is a human heregulin polypeptide or a fragment thereof.